



### New Film on Sudan War

Numerous friends and contacts from around the world have urged me to see the newly released film on controversial aid worker to Sudan, Sam Childers. Several ministers commented that I would really like the film and identify with its hero, the machine gun-wielding Christian working in Sudan.

### Filmmakers

Machine Gun Preacher, which has been released on DVD, stars Gerard Butler (who plays Sam Childers) who is also one of the Executive Producers of the film. Marc Forster (best known for the 007 Quantum of Solace and the Kite Runner films) is the Director. The Screenplay is by Jason Keller. Michael Shannon plays Donnie – a composite character representing Childers' biker pals. Sam Childers long-suffering wife, Lynn, is played by Michelle Monaghan.

### A Harrowing Story

Machine Gun Preacher is a harrowing portrayal of the true story of violent biker drug addict, Sam Childers, who within a day of being released from prison (in 1992) is again shooting heroin and falling back into his old criminal ways. He is cruel and abusive to his wife, Lynn, who he is disgusted to discover *found God* while he was in prison. Despite his insistence, she refuses to return to the "good money" of being a stripper. Childers

describes his wife as a  
*stripper.*"

"junkie

### Testimony

Yet Lynn stands firm and declares that she didn't find God, God found her, and that kind of previous lifestyle is *not right in the eyes of God*.

### Conversion

After a robbery and knifing a violent alcoholic, Childers realises that he cannot continue to live like this. He accepts his wife's invitation to attend a church service and stands and commits his life to Christ. After his baptism he seems to become a hard working, diligent father and husband and in time develops his own construction company which is successful.

### Uganda Ministry

In 1998, Childers was inspired by a visiting Missionary to fly to Uganda on a charity mission. There he helped build homes for families displaced by the LRA terrorist group.

### Atrocities in Sudan

Hearing of the even greater needs in South Sudan, he heads North and witnesses some of the all too common atrocities there: a young woman, whose lips have been cut off by the LRA and a young boy who steps on a landmine and loses both his legs. A whole village wiped out. Children kidnapped to be forced into becoming child soldiers for Kony's LRA.

### Orphanage

On his second visit to South Sudan, he decides to build an orphanage at Nimule, on the border of Uganda and South Sudan. This was the beginning of the Children's Village and his Angels of East Africa Ministry.

### Private Initiative

The film is good in that it shows Childers helping Africans with his own money and with the contributions of his friends and congregation. No government intervention, or tax funds are ever requested, or suggested. Individual charity and initiative is modelled and self-sufficiency is encouraged. That is a good message.

### **Exposing Evil**

Machine Gun Preacher is a message movie that makes a bold statement. It is good insofar that it exposes the hideous atrocities of Kony's LRA in Northern Uganda and Southern Sudan.

### **Strange Omission**

It is strange though that it did not show any atrocities of the National Islamic Front government of Sudan. It did not even show any aerial bombardments of villages, churches and hospitals by the Muslim government - which was, and is, far more prevalent. Nor does the film point out that Kony's LRA were funded and armed by the Islamic government of Sudan.

### **Excessive Obscenity**

The film is bad in the excessive obscenities and vast volume of vulgarity that spews out of the mouth of Sam Childers, and not all before he was saved either!

### **Drunkenness**

It is also bad in the substance abuse of the machine gun preacher, even getting drunk and initiating a bar room brawl after his conversion.

### **Disturbing Lack of Evangelism in Africa**

The film is disturbing in that there are absolutely no church services depicted in South Sudan. At no time do we see the South Sudanese praying, singing Hymns, or Childers engaged in any form of Evangelism in Africa. Did he only provide sanctuary for orphans and fight the LRA terrorists? Was Evangelism not part of his activities?

### **Distracting**

The film is distracting as it was evidently not filmed in Sudan. The roads are far too good! There is a great span bridge in a key sequence in South Sudan (even though all major bridges in

Southern Sudan were bombed and unserviceable during the war). There is also street lighting depicted in war time South Sudan! As well as glass windows!! It was all too obvious to me that Machine Gun Preacher must have been filmed in South Africa for the *Ugandan* and *South Sudan* sequences.

### **Absence of Sudanese**

It was also distracting to me that there were no Sudanese in the film. South African tribes are not like the much darker Sudanese and there were evidently no Dinka, or Nuer, tribesmen (who make up the majority of the SPLA), with their very distinctive forehead scars.

### **Disturbing Messages**

Far more seriously the messages in the film are disturbing: A convert who is meant to be a Christian who swears, drinks at bars, initiates a bar room brawl, and who neglects and verbally abuses his wife and daughter, is hardly an inspiring example. A self-appointed pastor who verbally abuses his wife and daughter and berates his congregation about their comfortable and safe lives – as though these blessings of God were something that they should feel bad about.

### **Built on Sand**

Childers' conversion must have been very brittle that he could have reached the point of questioning, and maybe even denying, God - over the sufferings that he had witnessed. That was toward the end of the film, and there was no verbal indication that he changes his mind, or regrets his blasphemous outburst.

### **Volatile**

Childers is depicted as acting like an emotional basket case, exploding at his family and congregation, swearing at his daughter for her prom plans and walking out on his wife, even as she pleads with him to not leave them now.

### **Absentee Father**

*"Your daughter needs a father and I need a husband!"* Yet at this point Childers walks out to go on another mission to Africa. His daughter is depicted as declaring that he loves the children in Africa more than his own family.

### **Complex**

In the film Sam Childers is portrayed as a complex hero, impetuous, headstrong, stubborn, obsessed to the point of mania, harassing everyone he knows for money. Lashing out at the ones he loves and who love him.

### **How Much of this Film is True?**

I do not know how much of this film is true and accurate. However Sam Childers recommends the film on his website and has publically expressed his satisfaction with the film, saying that he has watched it four times and cried every time. He declared that he wants people to walk out of the theatre thinking: *"I'm not doing enough! I want to do more!"* That's what the movie is about.

### **Wolves Teeth**

In the film Childers is depicted preaching to his congregation in Pennsylvania: *"God doesn't want sheep – He wants wolves to fight His fight. Men and woman with teeth to tear at the evil out there."*

### **Unprepared**

In his former life as a Hells Angel gang member, Childers was a shot-gunner (an armed guard for drug dealers). Yet, despite being warned time and again, by everyone concerned, of the ever present danger of attacks, particularly at night, by the LRA, Childers is depicted as being caught totally unprepared for the first rebel attack on his orphanage. He even has to run out into the open, where his SPLA escort is involved in a desperate fire-fight with the attackers, to ask where he can find a gun!

### **Plot Holes**

There are several huge plot holes. Inexplicably, just as it appears that they are about to be overrun by the assault, the scene ends. Without us knowing how they survived, the film shows Sam sitting in the ashes of the orphanage the next morning, somehow able to phone his wife back home.

### **Don't Give Up**

When he tells her that its all over, everything is in ashes and he is giving up and coming home,

his wife orders him to not give up and to rebuild the orphanage.

### **What is the Source of the Conflict?**

We do not learn what the source of the conflict is from this film. There is only one line: "*The Muslim North has been killing the Christians in the South for many years.*"

But no example of Arab atrocities are shown - not even aerial bombardments. Why are the other side fighting? What are their motives? What are their objectives? All of this is unclear and never explained, or even questioned. The whys, what's and who's of the conflict in South Sudan are not explored in this film.

### **One Man Against the World**

Essentially Machine Gun Preacher is Sam Childers story. It is not Sudan's story, nor is it a missionary story. Some parts of the film strain credulity, such as the perfect timing of Childers dramatic intervention to save the bleeding-heart red head aid worker who dared question his violent methods. This on a bridge that could not have existed anywhere in that whole region of South Sudan.

### **Does the End Justify the Means?**

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that this film is actually proclaiming that the end justifies the means.

### **No Agony of Conscience**

Sam Childers is portrayed as leading his soldiers into vigilante type action without any apparent qualms of conscience. (Unlike in Lawrence of Arabia, where Lawrence admits that he likes shedding blood too much).

### **Contrasts**

Africa's arid conditions, squalid poverty and desperate struggle for life is repeatedly contrasted with America's glittering and gluttonous luxuries, so that no one can avoid the insistent message that demands that you care about the orphans in Africa. In many ways, the film is a bold call to action: It is a fundraiser and a call to arms.

### **Hollywood Cliché**

As someone who has witnessed more bloodshed, death and atrocities than Sam Childers was confronted with in South Sudan, I'm disturbed by the Hollywood cliché that the normal response to intense warfare and extreme human suffering is to erupt in fury against everyone: friends, family and God Himself!

### **Personal Observation**

I've lived and worked in war situations repeatedly over the last 30 years and cannot identify with any of the emotional over-reactions depicted in such films as this. I have suffered capture, interrogations, torture and imprisonment, aerial bombardment and artillery and rocket fire without dissolving into an emotional basket case, or exploding against family and friends at home for "*not understanding!*" I have known many soldiers who have experienced far worse and none of them resemble the Hollywood stereotype of the emotionally and mentally disturbed vet exploding all over those who love them. And taking out their frustrations on their family, or blaming God. Doubtless such things do happen on occasion. However, missionaries tend to be very strong-willed people, not nearly as emotionally vulnerable as Hollywood seems to think appropriate.

### **Lessons to Learn**

Perhaps Machine Gun Preacher presents a timely warning of the danger of being a lone ranger in ministry. There is a real need for Bible College training, networking and Leadership Training in Missions. The behaviour of Childers, after his conversion and after becoming an aid worker to South Sudan, is unacceptable for any Christian worker.

### **A Higher Standard is Needed**

We certainly do not need foul language and gruesome injuries to prove that people are depraved. Machine Gun Preacher has a powerful and intense story, but the foul language will alienate decent people. There are some poignant and moral elements to this story, the transformation of a broken and aimless man, to a driven and determined crusader against kidnapping of child soldiers into Kony's LRA, is a gripping story, well worth being portrayed on the screen. However, the spiritual dimension conveyed in the film is very inadequate. Not much Scripture is quoted, or read from any pulpit.

### **If Only it Was That Easy!**

I was also interested to see how apparently easily Childers managed to build an orphanage in Sudan without any of the logistical problems that we encountered with our schools in South Sudan. Perhaps the film just skipped those details, but one wouldn't want aspirant missionaries

to get the wrong impression that things are anywhere near as straightforward and easy as they may have been portrayed in this film.

### **Who is Sam Childers?**

Since 1995, I have conducted 27 Missions to Sudan, working extensively throughout the South and in the Nuba Mountains of South Kordofan. In 1999, we began to hear stories of this American aid worker based in Nimule, on the border of Uganda, and his orphanage. I never personally met Sam Childers, but the local church leaders dismissed him as more of a mercenary than any kind of missionary.

### **Local Reactions**

The local bishop informed me that Childers seemed to have contempt for the church and spurned fellowship with any other Christians. In fact, they were concerned that his Shekinah ministry refused to co-operate with any of the local churches, or missions. Several pastors in his area dismissed him as "*probably a spy*", because he was not known to engage in any evangelism, or witnessing. Childers was not known to have conducted any church services, or given any indication of traditional Christian activity.

### **Isolation**

There was widespread respect for his providing sanctuary for destitute orphans. However, they complained that no one was allowed any access to them and those in his compound were isolated from the churches and community in the area.

### **Communication Failure**

I cannot personally confirm any of this, as I only saw his compound from outside. When we tried to organise a meeting we were not able to arrange any access. With such lack of communication and contact with local church leaders, it was inevitable that misunderstandings like these would arise.

### **An Untold Story**

I was disappointed that the genuine drama of Sudan was seldom seen in this film. The film did not depict any of the Christian Faith and courage of the South Sudanese that I saw on a daily basis. The testimony of Sam Childers most certainly gives good material for a dramatic film. I do hope that a more accurate and balanced film can be made, in South Sudan, without the

excessive obscenity which ruins this attempt. The Christians of South Sudan and the Nuba Mountains also deserve films to be made on their stories of Faith and courage under fire.

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Those who want to understand the colossal conflict in Sudan are encouraged to obtain the Jeremiah Films DVDs: [Sudan - The Hidden Holocaust](#) and [Terrorism and Persecution](#) , and

[Faith Under Fire in Sudan](#)

(320 pages and 200 pictures). Both these films and the book are available from:

**Christian Liberty Books,**

PO Box 358, Howard Place 7450, Cape Town, South Africa, tel: 021-689-7478, email:

[admin@christianlibertybooks.co.za](mailto:admin@christianlibertybooks.co.za)

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Those in North America can obtain these resources from: **Frontline Fellowship - USA**, P.O. Box 728, Manitou Springs, CO 80829, USA, tel: 719-685-2899, email:

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